

you cannot breathe well if you have not learnt how to do so. This is one of the rarest talents of a reader. I will explain myself. When you breathe in ordinary life, the air enters and leaves your lungs in an even, steady manner, like the tide of a spring which flows calmly, quietly, and continuously. But would that even current of air be sufficient to thrill your vocal chords? No; they would remain mute like a piano untouched by hands. The air stands in the same relation to the vocal apparatus as the fingers to the piano.

In speaking, the ordinary conditions of breathing are changed. You can only give what you have, and the more you expend the more you have. The little stock of air designed for ordinary unconscious purposes is no longer sufficient in quantity for the breath required by the energetic action of speech; so we must establish an equilibrium between our "have" and our "must have." We must lay in a stock, make an energetic appeal to the source itself, that is, to the atmosphere, so that it may furnish us with the air we require. This appeal is inspiration, or inhalation. Breathing, then, consists of two acts: inspiring, or inhaling, and breathing out, or exhaling. Inhaling is storing up, acquiring; exhaling is expending, giving out your wares.

There are then two totally different arts: inhaling is one art, exhaling is another. What does the art of inhaling consist of? In drawing in air from the very base of the lung, from the diaphragm itself. If you inhale from the upper part of the lung alone, you lay in too small a stock of air. You do not fill your store room. Barely a third of it is filled. What is the result? That your stock exhausts itself very quickly; too quickly; and if you have a long piece to read, you are like a man who has started on a journey in the desert with half-filled waterskins. Air fails you; you must return to procure more, which is exhausting; exhausting for you and also to your hearers, as you will presently see. The first duty, therefore, of the reader who has to provide for a long discourse, is to inhale deeply at the beginning, so as to have his lungs well filled.

Then comes the second act, which is more difficult, that of expending. A bad reader inhales too little, and exhales too much; that is to say, he squanders his goods without order and without measure.

Talma, when a young man, was playing the *Father of a Family*, by Diderot. At the famous speech beginning "£15⁰⁰

a year and my Sophy," he used to begin to shout, to rave, to scream, finally entering the wings utterly exhausted and blowing like a whale.

There was at that time in the theatre an actor named Dorival, thin, lanky, with a weak voice, he had nevertheless a certain amount of success as a tragic actor. "How does that animal manage it?" Said Talma to himself. "I am ten times as strong as he is and yet he fatigues himself ten times less than I do. I will ask him what his secret is?" Dorival answered, "Success such as yours, Mr. Talma, requires no lessons." "I shall find a way of making you give some," said Talma to himself.

So one day, when Dorival was playing Châtillon in *Zaire*, Talma hid himself—where do you think? In the prompter's box, in such a manner as to hear and see without himself being seen. There, crouched up in the darkness, he watches, spies, notices, looks, listens, and after the famous speech in the second act, he emerged exclaiming, "I have it, I have discovered his secret." What then had he discovered? That Dorival's art consisted in knowing how to breathe. Of what did this art consist? In making (I copy one of Talma's own notes) his inhalations before the air in his lungs was entirely exhausted; and in order to conceal from the public these repeated inhalations which would have cut the thread of his speech and even interrupted the flow of sentiment, he inhaled as much as possible before the *a*'s and *e*'s, and *o*'s, that is to say in places when the mouth, already open, allows of slight inhalations, without their being perceptible to the auditors.*

One last remark which is indispensable to the reader. If you wish to inhale and exhale freely, sit on a high chair. Crouched up in an armchair, you could not draw your breath from the very base of the lungs. I would even say, be careful to remain very upright. The man who stoops inhales badly, and exhales badly. Lastly, have a rest for your back as much as possible when reading in public and beginning to feel a slight vocal and cerebral fatigue. I have often been able to ease fatigue by leaning heavily against the back of my chair. Equilibrium is instantly re-established, I inhale freely, and even my head becomes clearer.

* Many writers say that this is only half the secret. *Inhale through the nose.*